

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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TAGS: PINT, PDEV, BF

SUBJECT: DEBATE ON EMERGENCY POWERS BILL

REF: NASSAU A-158

SUMMARY: JUNE 26 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON EMERGENCY POWERS BILL WAS MORE INTERESTING IN TERMS OF ITS MEDIUM THAN ITS MESSAGE. DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE HOUSE CHAMBER, WHILE SMALL IN NUMBERS, INDICATED INCREASED INVOLVEMENT IN DISSENT BY FORMER FNM LEADERS, INCLUDING CECIL WALLACE-WHITFIELD. OPPOSITION ATTACK ON BILL INSIDE CHAMBER WAS LARGELY AND WEAKLY LEGALISTIC AND PROVOKED PLP COUNTER-CHARGES BASED ON INEFFECTIVENESS OF FNM LEADERSHIP AND SPECIFICALLY ALLEGED INPOTENCE OF KENDAL ISAACS. END SUMMARY.

1. EMERGENCY POWERS BILL ITSELF, AS REPORTED REFAIR, WAS UNREMARKABLE IN THAT IT PARROTS PRE-INDEPENDENCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AND CLOSELY RESEMBLES SIMILAR ACTS IN OTHER COMMONWEALTH NATIONS. OPPOSITION ATTACK LED BY KENDAL ISAACS WAS CHARACTERISTICALLY TECHNICAL AND LEGALISTIC, ARGUING THAT WHILE BILL PRESCRIBED REGULATIONS APPLICABLE DURING STATE OF EMERGENCY IT DID NOT AUTHORIZE ANYONE TO DECLARE

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SUCH A STATE (PLP REPLY WAS THAT AUTHORITY IMPLIED BY

CONSTITUTION), AND THAT SOME TECHNICAL BUT NOT SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS OF UNCONSTITUTIONALITY EXISTED.

2. PLP BACK BENCHER ED MOXEY, STILL ENJOYING POPULAR SUPPORT BECAUSE OF THE JUMBEY VILLAGE DEBATE, POINTED TO THE CRUX OF THE POLITICAL CONTROVERSY OVER THE BILL; WHILE NO ONE DOUBTS THE WISDOM OR NECESSITY FOR EMERGENCY POWERS LEGISLATION, SOME PEOPLE ARE SUSPICIOUS OF SUCH POWERS IN THE HANDS OF AN UNSCRUPULOUS PLP GOVERNMENT. WHILE MOXEY DISCLAIMED SHARING SUCH SUSPICIONS, HE STRONGLY IMPLIED HE IN FACT DID SHARE THEM, AND ANNOUNCED HE WOULD ATTEMPT TO AMEND BILL ON ITS THIRD READING AND PASSAGE JULY 4 TO PROVIDE SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH EMERGENCY COULD BE DECLARED. MOXEY'S STATEMENT WAS STRONGEST SUBSTANTIVE ARGUMENT AGAINST BILL AND OBVIOUSLY DISPLEASED HIS PARTY LEADER, PM PINDLING, WHO APPEARS TO BE GRITTING HIS TEETH AND AWAITING A MORE PROPITIOUS MOMENT TO RETALIATE AGAINST MOXEY.

3. DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT ATTRACTED MORE ATTENTION THAN DEBATE INSIDE. SOME 300 DEMONSTRATORS MILLED AROUND RAWSON SQUARE IN OPPRESSIVE HEAT, WHILE 12 PICKETS PATROLLED THE SIDEWALK OUTSIDE THE HOUSE. FOR THE SECOND STRAIGHT PARLIAMENTARY SESSION, PINDLING, HANNA, DARLING AND BOWE WERE BOOED AS THEY ENTERED THE HOUSE. PINDLING IGNORED SUCH DEMONSTRATORS AS HE ENTERED, BUT WHEN HE LEFT FOR LUNCH BREAK AND WAS BOOED AGAIN HE PLUNGED INTO CROWD, SMILING, JOKING, SHAKING HANDS AND POSING WITH DEMONSTRATOR'S PLACARDS (OBVIOUSLY MOST GALLING ONE REFERRED TO SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER STORY THAT DURING RECENT FRISCO VISIT PINDLING AND HIS PARTY RAN UP \$694.35 DINNER BILL INCLUDING THREE BOTTLES OF WINE AT \$140.00 APIECE.) PINDLING LATER PHILOSOPHIZED THAT OVER A FIVE YEAR TERM ONE COULD NOT EXPECT TO "RIDE THE CREST" OF POPULARITY EVERY DAY, THAT IT WAS NOW OBVIOUS THAT JUMBEY AND JUNE 26 DEMONSTRATIONS WERE MANUFACTURED BY NEWLY AMBITIOUS FNM ELEMENTS, BUT THAT TO TOPPLE THE PLP, OPPONENTS WOULD HAVE TO "GET" HIM FIRST, WHICH WAS NOT ABOUT TO HAPPEN.

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4. PLP SUPPORTERS CLAIMED WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION THAT EMERGENCY POWERS DEMONSTRATION WAS CONTRIVED AND FED UPON MOST BAHAMIANS IGNORANCE OF WHAT DRAFT LEGISLATION PROVIDES (MOXEY'S RESPONSE WAS THAT SUCH IGNORANCE WAS GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY). PINDLING ALSO WAS AT LEAST PARTIALLY CORRECT IN NOTING INCREASED PARTICIPATION BY FNM ELEMENTS. WHILE PLPER MOXEY WAS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN DEMONSTRATION, HE HAD TO SHARE STAR BILLING

WITH CECIL WALLACE WHITFIELD, EX CLAIMANT TO THE PLP THRONE AND EX FNM CHIEF, WHO SUDDENLY POPPED UP IN RAWSON SQUARE TO JOIN IN THE PICKET LINE AND BE LOUDLY CHEERED BY CROWD. WHITFIELD HAS REFUSED TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC POLITICAL GATHERINGS SINCE HIS 1972 DEFEAT AND OBVIOUSLY RELISHED THE RESPONSE HE RECEIVED JUNE 26. WHEN EMBOFF SPOKE TO HIM LATER IN DAY, WHITFIELD WAS STILL EXPERIENCING NATURAL "HIGH" COMMON TO POLITICIANS WHO FEEL THEIR DAYS OF OBSCURITY MAY BE OVER.

5. WHILE ONE SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC APPEARANCE DOES NOT IMPLY A POLITICAL RESURRECTION, WHITFIELD'S RE-EMERGENCE GAVE KENDAL ISAACS A ROUGH DAY IN THE HOUSE. HANNA AND PINDLING, BOTH OF WHOM DETEST WHITFIELD PERSONALLY AND FEAR HIS CHARISMATIC APPEAL TO VOTERS FAR MORE THAN THEY DO ISAACS' COURTEOUS LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP, ROASTED ISAACS UNMERCIFULLY DURING THE DEBATE FOR HIS ALLEGED IMPOTENCE WITHIN THE FNM NOW THAT WHITFIELD APPEARS TO BE BACK ON THE SCENE. THEY MADE SOMBER REFERENCES TO WHITFIELD'S ALLEGELY UNSCRUPULOUS POLITICAL PAST AND TO THE "IRRESPONSIBILITY" THEY HINTED WOULD NOW TAKE OVER THE FNM ONCE AGAIN. WHITFIELD WAS NOT PRESENT DURING HOUSE DEBATE, AND WHEN EMBOFF GAVE HIM BRIEF RUN DOWN OF IT LATER IN DAY, WHITFIELD CHUCKLED WITH DELIGHT. ATTACK ON ISAACS' COMPETENCE WENT TO EXTENT THAT PLP MINISTER ROKER REVEALED (WHAT APPEARS TO BE TRUE) THAT AT THE 1972 CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION IN LONDON, ISAACS SIGNED A BLANK PIECE OF PAPER RATHER THAN WAIT FOR ALL PROVISIONS OF THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION TO BE HAMMERED OUT AND THUS MISS HIS CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION BACK IN THE BAHAMAS (IN FAIRNESS, IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES LEFT UNDECIDED BY ISAACS WERE OF GREAT MOMENT).

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6. COMMENT: WHILE CONTINUING DEMONSTRATIONS ARE BEGINNING TO GIVE PINDLING AND CO PAUSE, EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT PRIME MINISTER IS FULLY CONFIDENT OF HIS ABILITY TO RIDE THEM OUT. HIS ASSESSMENT APPEARS TO BE THAT MOXEY HAS LITTLE POWER BASE AND THAT HE WILL BE SQUEEZED OUT OF ANY SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN HIS POPULAR SUPPORT BY THE ARRIVAL ON THE SCENE (ENTERING FROM THE RIGHT) OF WHITFIELD. WHILE PINDLING AND HANNA HAVE NO REASON TO WELCOME WHITFIELD'S REAPPEARANCE, THEY MAY FIGURE THAT HIS SOMEWHAT SHOP WORN IMAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL PAST WILL KEEP HIM FROM BECOMING ANY REAL THREAT TO THEM. PINDLING HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION OF MOVES HE IS PREPARED TO MAKE WITHIN HIS CABINET OR ELSEWHERE IN GOVERNMENT TO COMPENSATE FOR NEW PRESSURES PLACED ON HIM AND HE APPEARS, AS THE PHRASE GOES, TO BE

"TOUGHING IT OUT". CARLTON FRANCIS, OF ALL PEOPLE,
SEEMS TO AGREE WITH PINDLING'S TACTICS, AND HE TOLD EMBOFF
JUNE 27 THAT "TIME IS NOT YET RIPE" FOR CHALLENGES TO PM.
SPIERS

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